THE YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC

The Politics of Development, 1962–1986

Robert D. Burrowes

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:
THE GULF

ROUTLEDGE

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:
THE GULF

Volume 16

THE YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC

Page Intentionally Left Blank

THE YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC

The Politics of Development, 1962–1986

ROBERT D. BURROWES

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1987 in Great Britain by Croom Helm Ltd.
First published in 1987 in the United States of America by Westview Press, Inc.

This edition first published in 2016
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 1987 Robert D. Burrowes

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-138-11959-8 (Set)
ISBN: 978-1-315-64190-4 (Set) (ebk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-18312-4 (Volume 16) (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-64530-8 (Volume 16) (ebk)

Publisher's Note
The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer
The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and would welcome correspondence from those they have been unable to trace.

The Yemen Arab Republic

The Politics of Development, 1962–1986

Robert D. Burrowes

Westview Press • Boulder, Colorado

Croom Helm • London and Sydney

This volume is included in Westview's Special Studies on the Middle East.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from Westview Press.

Copyright © 1987 by Westview Press, Inc.

Published in 1987 in the United States of America by Westview Press, Inc.; Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher; 5500 Central Avenue, Boulder, Colorado 80301

Published in 1987 in Great Britain by Croom Helm Ltd., Provident House, Burrell Row, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 1AT

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Burrowes, Robert D.
The Yemen Arab Republic.
(Westview special studies on the Middle East)
Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Yemen—Politics and government. I. Title.
II. Series.
DS247.Y48B87 1987 953'.32 86-15832
ISBN 0-8133-0435-0

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
Burrowes, Robert D.
The Yemen Arab Republic: the politics of development, 1962–1986.
(Westview special studies on the Middle East)
1. Yemen—social conditions
I. Title
953'.32053 HN564.A8
ISBN 0-7099-5024-1

Printed and bound in the United States of America

The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1984.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To

Ron Hart, a young anthropologist and friend
who died before he could write about the
Yemenis he knew and loved so well

and to

Leigh Douglas, a young and dedicated student
of Yemeni political history
who was killed by terrorists in Lebanon

and to

Four of the Yemenis who freely taught me so well
of the history, culture, and politics of
their beloved Yemen

Dr. Abd al-Karim al-Iryani

Muhammad Anaam Ghaleb

Muhammad Abdullah al-Shami

Amin Abd al-Wahid

Page Intentionally Left Blank

Contents

List of Maps xi
Preface xiii
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms xvii

1 Yemen and the Yemenis: An Introduction 1

Terrain and Climate 1
Settlements and Communications 6
People and Society 7
History and the Yemeni Nation 12

2 From Imamate to Republic: 1904–1967 15

The Time of Imams Yahya and Ahmad 15
The 1962 Revolution, the YAR, and the al-Sallal Era 22

3 National Reconciliation and the al-Iryani Era: 1967–1971 28

Conservative Republicanism and Its Constraints 28
Security Needs and Economic Constraints 34
Economic and Financial Institution Building 38

4 Contradictions in the al-Iryani Regime: 1971–1974 43

Improved Prospects 44
Manifest Political Constraints 49
The Coalition Strained 52

5 Political Adjustment and Socioeconomic Development Under al-Hamdi: 1974–1976 57

Political Adjustment Under al-Hamdi 58
State Building and Modernization Under al-Hamdi 62
The al-Hamdi Regime and Political Construction 67

6 **Domestic Stalemate and Fast-evolving External Politics: 1975–1977** 75

The Domestic Stalemate 75
Foreign Policy and External Relations 78

7 **The al-Ghashmi Interlude: 1977–1978** 86

The Death and Legacy of al-Hamdi 86
The Accession and Rule of al-Ghashmi 88
Al-Ghashmi's Demise 92

8 **The Salih Regime: Bleak Prospects and Faint Hopes, 1978–1981** 94

The Salih Regime Hits Bottom: Spring 1979 94
Attempts to Stem and Turn the Political Tide: 1979–1981 98

9 **Political Pieces Put into Place: 1982–1984** 118

The NDF and the PDRY 119
Completion and Promotion of the Second Five-Year Plan 122
The National Dialogue and the General People's Congress 124
Economic Troubles and Political Order: 1983–1984 125

10 **Yemen and Petroleum: The Mid-1980s and Beyond** 133

The Search for Oil in Yemen 134
Yemeni Oil: Current Effects and Implications for the Future 140
Conclusion 151

Postscript: December 1986 153

Notes 157
Bibliographical Essay 161
Index 163

Maps

1 Regional setting 2

2 The Yemen Arab Republic 3

3 The two Yemens 13

Page Intentionally Left Blank

Preface

From my notebook on Christmas Day 1975, in the city of Taiz, the Yemen Arab Republic: "I want to keep my story about the politics of development in Yemen current, to bring it down as close to today as I can. The general reading public in the USA is not exactly waiting with bated breath for a book on Yemen. I want to snare a few readers who are not Middle East specialists or blood relatives, and I think my chances will be better if I can lay claim to the latest word on a place that, if I'm lucky, may be somewhat in the news." I finally finished the book in late spring 1986, and I was lucky. Hunt Oil Company struck oil in the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in 1984, and newspaper and magazine coverage picked up after that. The YAR president opened the first Yemeni oil refinery in April 1986, an occasion attended by U.S. Vice President George Bush and, among others, executives from Hunt Oil and Exxon Corporation. Three months earlier, the ruling Marxist party in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the other Yemen, was convulsed by a very bloody and public struggle for power, an event of considerable interest to corporate and government leaders in the United States.

Why a book on North Yemen or, more properly, the Yemen Arab Republic? This book is my equivalent of Hillary's climbing Everest because it was there: I wrote about North Yemen because that's where I ended up. I went to the YAR for the first time and in complete ignorance to visit with friends when I fled Lebanon and my teaching job at the American University of Beirut during the fighting in late 1975. The "short visit until things settled down in Beirut" turned into a year's stay, lasting through most of 1976, and a decision to learn from scratch about the politics of development in the YAR. A year in New York and Beirut was followed by a four-year stay in the YAR, from 1978 through 1981. During my time in the YAR, while residing in Taiz, Sanaa, and a bit in rural al-Mahwit, I built furniture for expatriates, helped bring up and teach soccer to a fine young man, did consulting and a couple of studies for development agencies, and directed a USAID-funded rural-development project for American Save the Children. Mostly, though, I spent my five years in the YAR poking around and studying the Yemenis and their politics. Largely by chance, I became friends with several very knowledgeable Yemenis in high posts, and I have had the good luck of being able to maintain some of these contacts since leaving the YAR.

One peevish reason for writing about the YAR is to counter the Saudi-centered view of the Arabian Peninsula that prevails in the United States, one in which the Peninsula is seen as big, rich Saudi Arabia surrounded by a handful of tiny, weak, and artificial Arab oil states and an uncertainly located place or places called Yemen. ("Is there more than one of them?" "It's Communist, isn't it?") I have come to care greatly for this place called Yemen. It has been of real importance from time to time in human history and is just now again becoming an important country on the Arabian Peninsula. Indeed, I have my own metaphor for the Peninsula, one that reveals my bias in favor of Yemen. Yemen is comparable to the lowest corner of a giant, mostly empty, rectangular pants pocket—the Arabian Peninsula. Over the millennia, this corner has collected most of the pocket's mountains, rainfall, vegetation, people, history, monuments, and other cultural artifacts. Seemingly not included, alas, was the oil of Arabia and the new cities, industries, and wealth spawned by that oil. It is in combination with these other resources that the recent discovery of oil is about to make a big difference for the YAR.

Another reason for this book is my long intellectual and emotional involvement in politics, nation-state building, and socioeconomic change in the Third World. North Yemen informs the student of the history of modernity. Almost totally isolated and insulated from the modern world and modern politics until the 1962 Revolution, it is still for the most part a living museum—one of the last extant examples of a large and complex traditional social system—and a nearly unique historical laboratory for students of political and socioeconomic change. These processes, now moving very rapidly in the YAR, are still in their early stages, and many of the leaders who initiated modern nation-state building, political construction, and socioeconomic change are still active in Yemeni government and politics—and willing to talk about it. Having grown to young adulthood in a profoundly traditional society, they are now, in their mid-40s to early-50s, contemporary equivalents of the men who launched the process of state building in fifteenth- or sixteenth-century England and France. They will not be found in the YAR, nor will their likes be found elsewhere in the world, for many more years.

This study focuses on the events and issues of nation-state building and socioeconomic change in North Yemen in the years just before the 1962 Revolution and, in much greater detail, during the quarter century since the YAR was founded. The material is presented chronologically and by regime. An introductory chapter on Yemen and the Yemenis is followed by a chapter on the traditional political system of North Yemen, the Zaydi imamate, particularly during the first six decades of the twentieth century, and on the al-Sallal regime that founded the YAR and ruled from the 1962 Revolution until 1967. Chapters 3 and 4 deal at length with the regime headed by President Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani and with efforts to end a long civil war and to proceed with the tasks of state building and modernization between 1967 and 1974. Chapters 5 and 6 explore the efforts of

President Ibrahim al-Hamdi to renovate the political system and to establish the YAR in the regional system during the years between his assumption of power in 1974 and his assassination in 1977. After a short chapter on the brief tenure of President Ahmad al-Ghashmi, chapters 8 and 9 discuss the long rule of President Ali Abdullah Salih and his relatively successful effort since 1978 to reconstitute the political system and to generate support and legitimacy for himself and the system over which he presides. Chapter 10, the final chapter, deals with the politics of development during the period 1984–1986, particularly as it relates to the discovery and initial development of oil in the YAR, and with the domestic and external implications of this oil for the future.

I regard it a great privilege to have lived and worked in the YAR during this exciting and crucial period of its history. It would take a full page just to list all of the Yemenis, other than the four in the dedication, who helped make this study possible. Let me offer them a collective but nonetheless heartfelt thanks, a thanks for being, in addition to kind and generous, so open to and trusting of the questioning American in their midst. I don't like to call my friends "my informants," but my friends did inform me so well and freely. I also want to thank my many non-Yemeni friends, American and otherwise, who supported my efforts in Yemen and New York with free lodging, little jobs, facts, ideas, and kind encouragement. My thanks also to the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies for funds for research in the YAR in 1978 and to my colleagues at New York University's Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies, especially R. Bayly Winder, Farhad Kazemi, Alexander Melamid, and Peter Chelkowski, for their support and encouragement since 1982. Finally, I want to thank JoAnn Stevens, my wife, who put up with four years of groans, long silences, and tiresome threats of suicide. "Do it or don't do it, but stop whining," she said—often. And she also got us both to quit smoking well before I finished my fitful scribbling.

Robert D. Burrowes
Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies
New York University

Page Intentionally Left Blank

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ANM	Arab Nationalist Movement
BP	British Petroleum
CPO	Central Planning Organization
CYDA	Confederation of Yemeni Development Associations
FLOSY	Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen
GPC	General People's Congress
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LCCD	local council for cooperative development
LDA	local development association
NLF	National Liberation Front
NIPA	National Institute for Public Administration
NDF	National Democratic Front
NDC	National Dialogue Committee
OPIC	(United States') Overseas Private Investment Corporation
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PRF	Popular Resistance Forces
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PCA	People's Constituent Assembly
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic
YBRD	Yemen Bank for Reconstruction and Development
YHOC	Yemen Hunt Oil Company
Yomico	Yemen Oil and Mines Industry Company
Yominco	Yemen Oil and Mineral Company
YSP	Yemeni Socialist party

Page Intentionally Left Blank

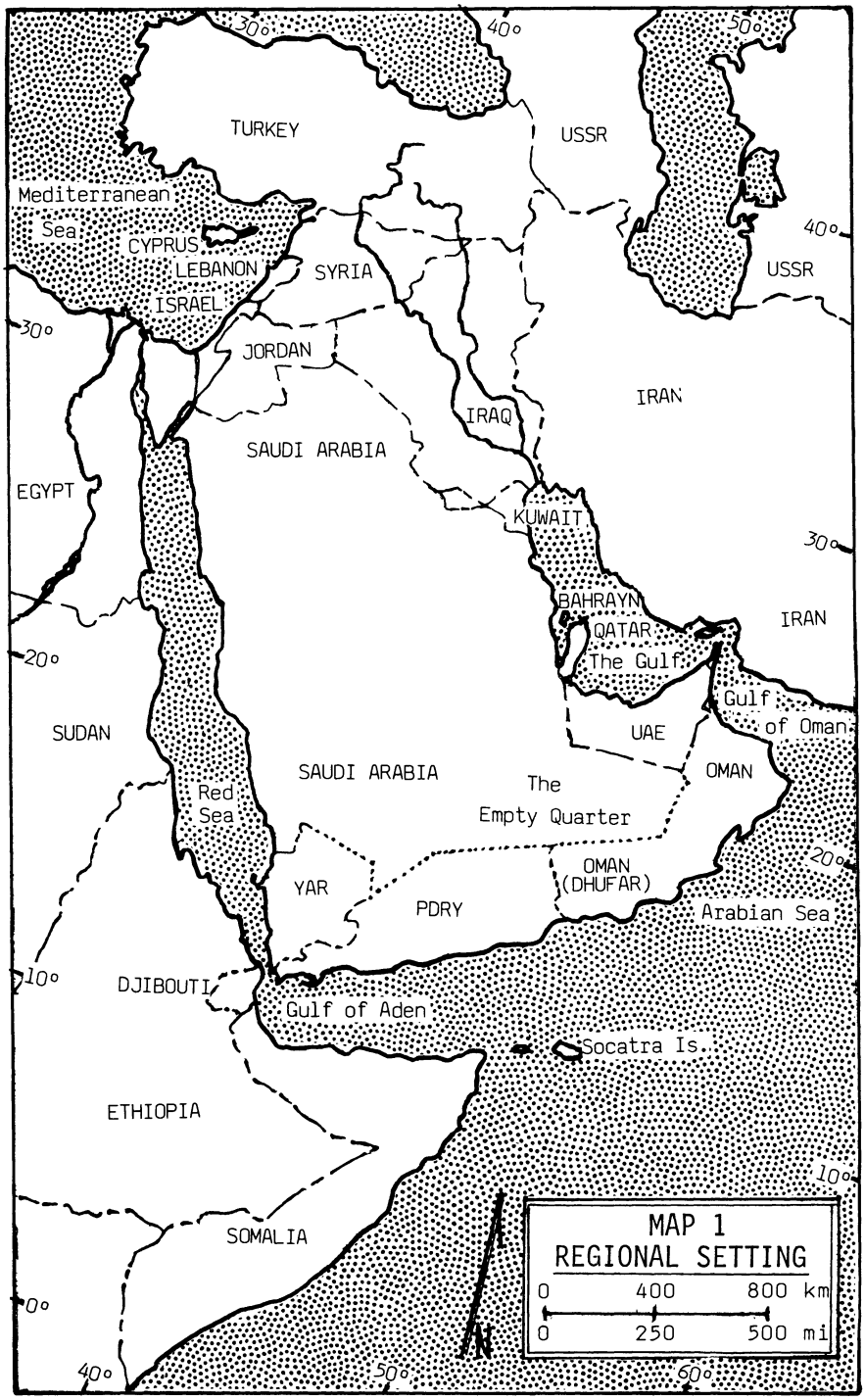
1

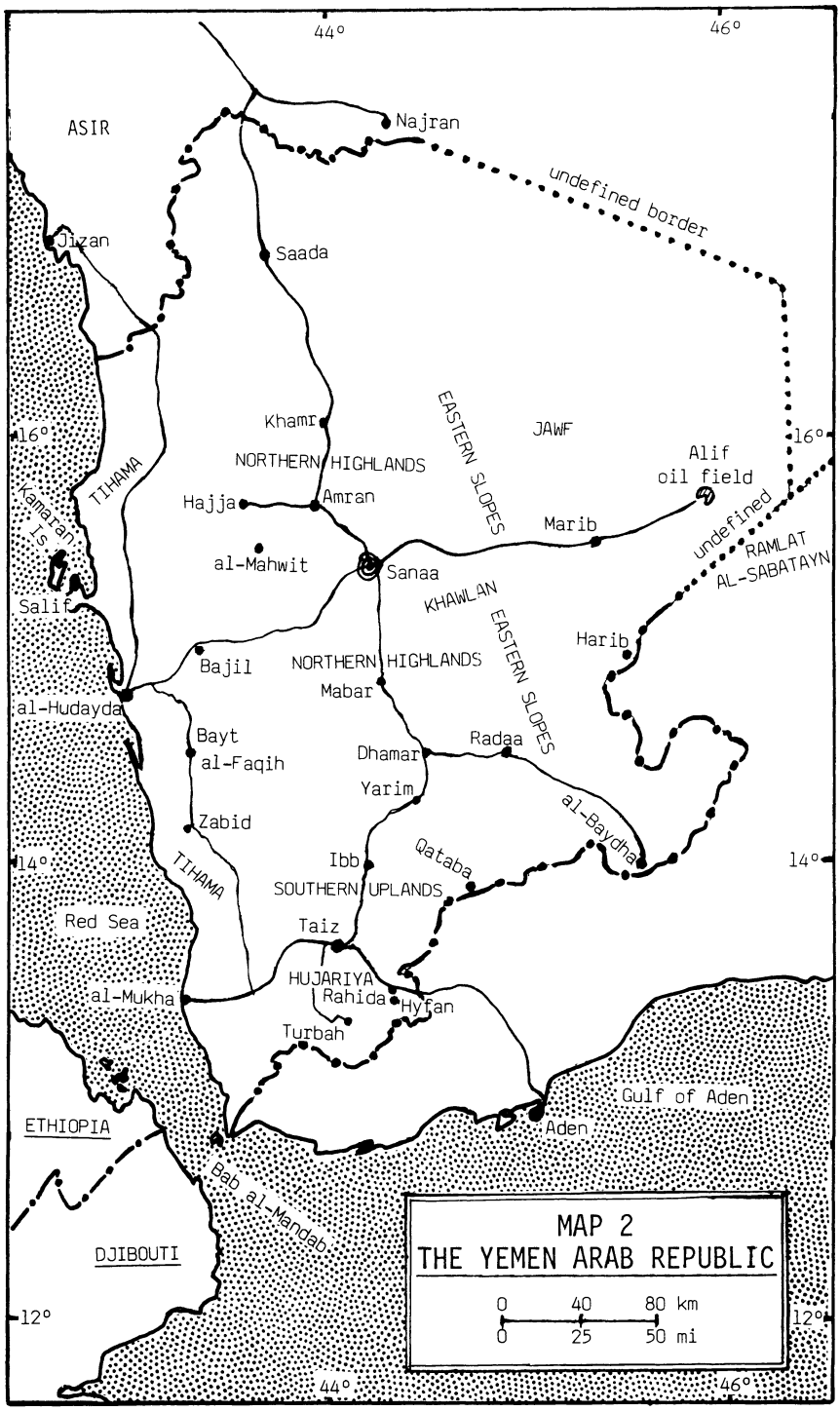
Yemen and the Yemenis: An Introduction

North Yemen, or, more properly, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), is located on the margins of the Arab world, on the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula, the corner that is formed by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, pointed toward Ethiopia and Djibouti, and separated from the African continent by the narrow Bab al-Mandab Straits. (See Map 1.) It shares this corner of Arabia with South Yemen, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), which is less to its south than to its southeast and east. The YAR is bounded unambiguously on the west by the waters of the Red Sea and less precisely on the north and northeast by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The YAR's long eastern border with the PDRY and its shorter northeastern one with Saudi Arabia are still undemarcated; the YAR and its two neighbors converge at an uncertain point on the edge of the inhospitable desert known as the al-Rub al-Khali, the Empty Quarter. Dwarfed by Saudi Arabia, which is eleven times its size, the YAR occupies a tiny portion of the land mass of the Arabian Peninsula. Although its exact size is made uncertain by undemarcated borders, it is roughly the size of the state of Nebraska or South Dakota. In this small area reside, according to the 1986 census, approximately nine million people, a bit fewer than in Ohio but more than in Michigan. The YAR's population is larger than that of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and slightly more than half the total for the entire peninsula. Its number of people may be four times that of the PDRY, even though the YAR has less than two-thirds the area of this neighbor. Together, the two Yemens contain a clear majority of the total population of the Arabian Peninsula.

Terrain and Climate

Much of North Yemen consists of ruggedly mountainous terrain, belying notions that the Arabian Peninsula consists of only flat or gently rolling expanses of sand desert and otherwise arid land. The steep, jagged mountains run roughly north and south the full length of the country, parallel to the Red Sea coast. (See Map 2.) The mountain peaks rise higher as one moves


30°
40°
50°
TURKEY
USSR
Mediterranean Sea
CYPRUS
LEBANON
SYRIA
ISRAEL
JORDAN
IRAQ
IRAN
SAUDI ARABIA
EGYPT
KUWAIT
BAHRAYN
QATAR
The Gulf
Gulf of Oman
UAE
OMAN
SUDAN
Red Sea
SAUDI ARABIA
The Empty Quarter
OMAN (DHUFAR)
YAR
PDRY
Arabian Sea
DJIBOUTI
Gulf of Aden
Socatra Is.
ETHIOPIA
SOMALIA
20°
10°
0°
60°
MAP 1
REGIONAL SETTING
0 400 800 km
0 250 500 mi
N


44°
46°
ASIR
Najran
undefined border
Jizan
Saada
Khamir
EASTERN SLOPES
JAWF
16°
NORTHERN HIGHLANDS
Alif
oil field
TIHAMA
Hajja
Amran
Marib
Yemaran Is.
al-Mahwit
Sanaa
undefined
RAMLAT AL-SABATAYN
Salif
KHAWLAN
EASTERN SLOPES
Harib
Bajil
NORTHERN HIGHLANDS
Mabar
al-Hudayda
Bayt al-Faqih
Dhamar
Radaa
Yarim
al-Baydha
Zabid
14°
Ibb
Qataba
TIHAMA
SOUTHERN UPLANDS
Red Sea
Taiz
HUJARIYA
Rahida
Hyfan
al-Mukha
Turbah
Gulf of Aden
ETHIOPIA
Aden
Bab al-Mandab
DJIBOUTI
12°
MAP 2
THE YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC
0 40 80 km
0 25 50 mi

south from the border with Saudi Arabia and attain their greatest height west of Sanaa, the YAR's capital city. The summit of Jabal Nabi Shuayb, at more than 12,000 feet (3,700 meters), is the highest point on the Arabian Peninsula. Though still formidable, the mountains gradually diminish in height as one moves south from Sanaa toward the PDRY. They turn nearly 90° to the east near the border between the two Yemens, and their southern face drops off precipitously several thousand feet to lowlands that then slope south toward Aden, the capital of the PDRY, and the Gulf of Aden.

North Yemen is located between the equator and the Tropic of Cancer, at about the same latitude as the northern half of Central America from Nicaragua to southern Mexico. Proximity to the equator means that the length of days and nights varies little from season to season and that periods of light and dark are roughly of equal length throughout the year. This, in combination with high elevations, results in a climate for much of the country that is pleasantly temperate year-round. Sanaa, at about 7,500 feet (2,300 meters [m]) and 15° North, boasts fine weather marred only by lip-cracking dryness and dust-laden winds during part of the year. A key to the pleasant weather of Sanaa and most of those areas of the country at altitudes from 4,500 to 9,000 feet (1,400 to 2,800 m) is the speed with which the earth's surface heats and cools in the often cloudless sky and thin atmosphere. Summer days, typically very warm and sometimes quite hot, are usually tempered by cool evenings and nights. Midwinter nights can be quite cold, and temperatures occasionally drop a bit below freezing during the early morning hours. Winter days, however, are generally warm, owing to the sunny, clear skies that usually prevail. The weather at low elevations, on the Red Sea coast and in the interior to the east and northeast, is far less benign.

Although more abundant in North Yemen than elsewhere on the Arabian Peninsula, the rainfall in most of the country is sparse and erratic at best. The country is on the edge of the Indian Ocean monsoon system. In years when the warm, moist winds from the southwest blow strong, the rain falls as the cooling air is forced up and over the mountains; but when the winds fail, the rain does not come and the land is subject to drought, sometimes for two or more years in succession. Ordinarily there are two rainy seasons, one in the spring and the bigger, more reliable one in the summer and early fall. Hailstorms occur in summer, but few Yemenis have ever seen snow, even from a distance. The rainfall in the Sanaa region, the geographic center of the country, ranges from 8 to 20 inches (20 to 50 centimeters) per year. Greater at the higher elevations to the west and in the uplands south of Sanaa, which are positioned to benefit first and most from the moist winds, the rainfall drops off markedly to the north, northeast, and east of Sanaa. By the time the winds reach these areas, if they reach them at all, they have been stripped of moisture.

The mountain spine of North Yemen helps divide it into four major geographic regions. The heart of the country is in and just to the east of this spine and is divided nearly 85 miles (135 kilometers [km]) south of

Sanaa by the major north-south pass, the Samarra Pass, into two regions, the northern highlands and the southern uplands. The less extensive southern uplands, also known as Lower Yemen, are somewhat lower in elevation and less rugged than the much larger northern highlands, or Upper Yemen. A disproportionately large part of the population of North Yemen is concentrated on the plateaus and terraced hillsides as well as in the valleys and stream beds of the northern highlands and especially the southern uplands. It is in these two regions of higher elevation and cooler temperatures that most of the country's small amount of rain falls, making possible the cultivation of life-sustaining crops of sorghum and some wheat, barley, and alfalfa. Also grown here are coffee and *qat*, the privet-like shrub whose tender leaves are chewed regularly by many Yemeni men and women for their mildly stimulative effect. The rain and the wild vegetation and cultivated crops in streambeds and on the fine system of dry-well terraces of these regions provide sharp contrast to the forbidding aridity of most of the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, earning Yemen in ancient times the name Arabia Felix. Ibb province, in the southern uplands just below the Samarra Pass, is called the Green Province and, along with Taiz province farther to the south, supports the most intensive cultivation and the highest population density in the country. The climatic change is sudden and pronounced travelling south from Samarra—warmer, moister air as well as more abundant and different vegetation, including cacti and yuccas that do not thrive in the harsher, more austere climate in the northern highlands.

The Tihama, or coastal plain, is the third and the most clearly defined region of North Yemen. Varying in width from 20 to 40 miles (32 to 64 km), the Tihama runs the full length of the country, squeezed between the Red Sea and the mountains that rise abruptly to the east. Near sea level and very flat, the Tihama receives no appreciable rainfall and is extremely hot, hazy, and humid much of the year. The heat and humidity, especially during the summer sandstorms, are enervating and make work, and even living, difficult. At present, the Red Sea provides a livelihood for some fishermen, and its beaches and breezes afford relief and pleasure for a small number of others, mostly foreigners. Although most of it is extremely arid, and some of it is sand desert, the Tihama is cut east-west by several major stream beds, or wadis, each fed by the runoff from large catchment areas that begin high in the mountains to the east. Filled with water for only short periods during and after the rainy seasons, these wadis contain considerable amounts of water below the surface that bubble up at springs or can be tapped by shallow wells. Even the ports, fishing villages, and palm groves on the edge of the sea are sustained by the water that flows underground after falling as rain far inland on the mountains. The relatively small population of the Tihama is densely concentrated in places where this groundwater is readily accessible—at the base of the foothills and along the major wadis and their tributaries. In those few places where water is available in abundance, the Tihama is lush and tropical, dotted with irrigated fields of cotton, millet, bananas, papayas, melons, and vegetables. Indeed, modern technology and the sizable aquifer at the foot of the mountains

make the wadis on the Tihama places of significant agricultural potential, more so than anywhere else in the YAR.

The fourth geographic region lies to the east and northeast of the peaks and plateaus of the northern highlands. In contrast to the sharp drop down to the Tihama, the mountains gently slope eastward toward the interior of the Arabian Peninsula and the forbidding Empty Quarter. The farther one moves east, the more the land looks like either a moonscape or a Hollywood desert. This large region is by far the most sparsely populated in all of North Yemen and contains no town of any size or consequence. The only bedouins in the country are found on the region's eastern edge, living a nomadic or semi-nomadic existence. Nevertheless, the runoff eastward for many miles from the mountains provides abundant groundwater to some places—for example, in Wadi Jawf and around the town of Marib. Modern pumps and irrigation works, the latter epitomized by the recent construction of a new version of the fabled Marib Dam, the engineering marvel of the Sabean Kingdom more than two millennia ago, hold out the promise of agricultural development in parts of the region. And more than agricultural change is in the offing. It is here that oil was discovered in 1984, and the new refinery and oil wells will surely rival the Marib Dam as symbols of the YAR's progress.

Settlements and Communications

Historic Yemen was, and today's YAR to a surprising degree still is, a country of a few small cities, many towns, and a vast number of small villages and tiny hamlets. The combined population of the YAR's three cities—Sanaa, with about 425,000 persons, and the much smaller Taiz (175,000) and al-Hudayda (250,000)—still comprise less than 10 percent of the total population of the country. By comparison, greater Beirut alone contained a third of the entire population of Lebanon in 1975. North Yemen's thousands of towns, villages, and hamlets are widely distributed over much of the country. Rooted firmly in the distant past, this settlement pattern persists today both because Yemen is still in the early stages of development and because the recent flow of workers from the countryside has been abroad rather than to the cities within the country. As a consequence, the YAR has thus far been largely spared the urban problems that have plagued most late-developing countries. On the other side of the ledger, the difficulty of delivering services and the inability of the state to exercise much control over the citizenry have been costs of the widely dispersed population. A land of rugged terrain in which settlement areas were linked, if at all, by tenuous and limited means of transportation and communications, North Yemen was and still remains marked by areas of isolation and great diversity from place to place, a sharp contrast to societies on deltas and in river valleys where populations are more homogeneous and accessible.

The vital center of North Yemen in recent decades has been the misnamed, misshapen "triangle," the area traced by the three roads that connect Sanaa,

Taiz, and al-Hudayda. Each side of this triangle is roughly 150 miles (250 km) long, and the area enclosed is the southwestern third of the country. The state in modern times has rarely had effective control over more than the area of the triangle, and often the reach of the government has fallen well short of that. Much of what little modernization has come to North Yemen has taken place on and near the three roads that trace the triangle. In addition to the cities of Sanaa, Taiz, and al-Hudayda, four of the country's five largest towns—Ibb, Dhamar, Zabid, and Bayt al-Faqi—lie on these roads. Only Saada, far to the north, falls well outside the triangle.

The history of the YAR since 1962 is largely the history of its new roads as agents of integration and change. The asphalted, two-lane roads connecting the three cities, which roughly follow centuries-old footpaths and caravan ways, are the YAR's three main roads. The construction and paving of these modern roads was begun about 1960 and not finished until well into the mid-1970s. Spreading from this core, paved roads have been completed since the late 1970s from Sanaa to Saada in the far north, south from Taiz to Turbah, east from Sanaa to Marib, east from Dhamar to Radaa and al-Baydha, west from Sanaa to Hajja via Amran, north from al-Hudayda to the Saudi border and southeast from Taiz to the PDRY border. When completed, a second road between Sanaa and al-Hudayda, arcing south of the one built in the early 1960s, will ease traffic on the YAR's most heavily travelled artery. As significant as the paved roads has been the rapid construction of thousands of miles of dirt and stone feeder roads, making thousands of villages and hamlets reachable by four-wheel drive vehicles for the first time. Roadheads, advancing slowly behind bulldozers and blasting crews toward remote villages, are foci of change and sites of makeshift shops with imported canned goods, taxis to carry people to the cities, and drums of gasoline to fuel electrical generators and four-wheel drive vehicles. The new feeder roads mean new opportunities, and many Yemenis with money earned working abroad have been quick to buy the vehicles that will help them take advantage of these new opportunities.

People and Society

The peoples indigenous to the northern highlands, the southern uplands, and the eastern slopes are racially Arab Semites. They are small-boned and of diminutive stature—indeed, they are among the smallest people of the world. The people of the southern uplands, and of the PDRY to the south, tend to have slightly darker complexions and rounder facial features than those of the north and east, suggesting a greater mixing of the Semites of Arabia with other racial groups. The people of the Tihama, very different from those of the other regions, evidence strong influence of nearby Africa. Here are found the stature, color, and facial features of both Ethiopians and negroidal Africans.

Many persons familiar with both North Yemen and Afghanistan maintain that each of these late-developing countries is more like the other than

like any other country in the world. The resemblance is as much or more a matter of culture and social organization than of geography and settlement pattern. North Yemen, like Afghanistan, is a pervasively Islamic country. Except for a small Ismaili Muslim population and a tiny Jewish community, both of which are now much smaller than in past generations, the people of North Yemen are divided between two Islamic groups, the Zaydis and the Shafais, and this sectarian division has had a profound effect, political and otherwise, on historic and modern Yemen. The two communities established themselves in Yemen early in the Islamic era, at least a thousand years ago, and have been the dominant groups in most generations since that time. The old myth of numerical parity notwithstanding, the Shafai community is and probably has been for a long time considerably larger than the Zaydi community. Over the centuries, the Zaydis came to reside in the mountainous highlands as well as in the far north and northeast, whereas the Shafais populated the southern uplands and the Tihama. The rough dividing line between the two communities is the same Samarra Pass that separates Upper Yemen from Lower Yemen, and the Iryan, an area to the west of Samarra, has been described as part of the DMZ—the demilitarized zone—separating the Zaydis and the Shafais. Ibb and Taiz provinces as well as al-Hudayda province are Shafai areas, whereas Dhamar province and the provinces to its north are Zaydi. South Yemen, the PDRY, is wholly Shafai.

Although the Zaydis are Shii Muslims and the Shafais are Sunni, the Zaydi branch of Shiism is more similar to the rationalist schools of Sunnism than to the mystical, millenarian sects that are typical of Shiism. Like Sunnism generally, Zaydi Shiism is an establishment religion, not one born of defeat and dissent. As a result, the very real differences between the two communities in Yemen have been and are less religious—less matters of dogma and ritual—than cultural, social, and political. The Zaydis of the northern highlands and the Shafais of the southern uplands constitute separate subcultures, the main features of which were forged in the history of the past four or five centuries. Each community has viewed its relationship to the other in "us-them" terms. Segregated socially as well as geographically, the members of each community have tended to feel more comfortable with and more easily understood by their own kind.

The differences between the Zaydis and the Shafais are partly matters of oppressors and oppressed, of warrior-rulers and subject peasants and merchants. The Zaydis have ruled the Shafais more often than not over recent centuries, and Zaydi jurists and theologians developed an elaborate political theory that justified the rule of the Zaydi ruler, the imam, over fellow Zaydis as well as non-Zaydi subjects. Almost all the imams' counselors, judges, and administrators were drawn from the upper ranks of the Zaydi community, and it was the Zaydi tribes in the north that supported the Zaydi imams with their armed tribal irregulars. The Zaydi imamate patronized culture, learning, and the arts, albeit to a modest degree, and learned Zaydis dominated and were the arbiters of these matters. At the top of Yemeni society, the Zaydi leaders felt superior and found it easy to think themselves

the best in the best of all known worlds. Largely confined to the highlands and cut off from the outside world, the Zaydis had little opportunity and inclination to compare their life to alternatives the outside world had to offer. They were a proud, inward-looking mountain people with a narrow, parochial perspective.

For its part, the Shafai community exhibited contradictory tendencies of submission and rebellion in the face of Zaydi power and claims to authority. More often than not, the Shafais chose or were forced to accept the imam as their secular ruler, though not as their religious leader. Denied political position and social status, some Shafais turned to trade and commerce, particularly in Taiz and al-Hudayda. Many more emigrated, to Aden and sometimes far beyond, as students, laborers, sailors, merchants, and other businessmen, and were thereby exposed to the modern world and its ideas to a far greater extent than were the more isolated Zaydis of the highlands. Many of these Shafai émigrés and their offspring returned to Yemen over the years, bringing with them some of the skills learned in the outside world. Marginal men in a Zaydi-dominated society, the more able of the Shafais were open to change and innovation. Increasingly aware of their marginality in the twentieth century, these Shafais felt more and more deprived and entitled to a fairer share, whereas their Zaydi counterparts inclined toward conservation, particularly of their privileges.

The differences between the Zaydis of the highlands and the Shafais of the uplands were less than those between either of these groups and the "Africanized" Shafais of the Tihama. Relative poverty, African social and cultural influences, and a measure of racial prejudice placed the indigenous people of the Tihama at the bottom of the social order, even a people apart and outside some common conceptions of the Yemeni society. If the Zaydis of the highlands look down on the Shafais of the uplands, both groups looked down on the Shafais of the Tihama and Yemenis born abroad, especially of non-Yemeni mothers.

North Yemen, again like Afghanistan, is distinguished by its tribal social organization. In both countries tribes and tribalism, rather than being mere vestiges of the past, are vital forces that continue to play determinant roles in the political as well as the social and cultural spheres. Despite the tendency to categorize Upper Yemen as tribal and Lower Yemen as peasant, tribes and tribalism are part of the cultural, social, and political landscape of all regions of North Yemen, even the Tihama. For centuries, what has distinguished the northern highlands from the other regions of the country is the importance, almost to the exclusion of anything else, of the tribe as a unit of identification and action and the great extent to which sub-tribes and tribes can be mobilized and organized into large tribal confederations when the interests of the tribal system or its constituent parts are at stake. Many residents of the southern uplands claim a tribal lineage, but this often seems to be less important as a basis of personal identity than place of origin—a village, wadi, or locality—or some other attribute. By contrast, many men of the highlands define themselves primarily in terms of their

tribes, and many of these tribes with their present names were in existence at least a thousand years ago, often on the same land on which they currently reside. Almost all the tribes of the northern highlands and the eastern slopes are grouped into two great tribal confederations, the Hashid and the Bakil, and, as Paul Dresch estimated, the tribal population in these areas "is nowadays in excess of half a million, divided rather unevenly among some seven major Hashid tribes and perhaps fourteen from Bakil."[1]

The Yemeni social system is composed of two distinguishable but interdependent tribal and nontribal subsystems that meet primarily in the marketplace (the *souk*), be it the *souk* in a town or city or the weekly *souk* at a rural crossroads. The tribal subsystem, the domain of which is the villages and hamlets of the countryside, is made up of greater and lesser tribes, each consisting of the shaykh and his tribal following. The shaykh represents and protects the members of his tribe in their dealings with other tribes and the nontribal system; the members can hardly conceive of being and acting outside their tribe, and this sense of dependency is a key to the solidarity of the tribe. The Hashid and Bakil confederations, which have varied over time in terms of their internal cohesiveness and unity, are each headed by a paramount shaykh, a shaykh of shaykhs. The paramount shaykhs and lesser shaykhs have been preoccupied for centuries with defending both the autonomy of the tribes in relationship to nontribal authorities in Yemen and their rights to regulate affairs within their tribal domains. Although conflict between Yemeni tribes is common, the tribes do not conquer and occupy the lands of neighboring tribes, much less destroy those tribes. By contrst, there is a long history of both tribal sacking of towns in the northern highlands and tribal forays—or large-scale migrations—into richer agricultural areas of the west and south. Sanaa was pillaged by the tribes as recently as 1948, an event still fresh in the memories of people both inside and outside the tribal system.

The cities and major towns of Yemen, the foci of commerce, the state, and Islamic learning, are largely nontribal and in a fundamental way antitribal. These urban settings, even those in strongly tribal areas, consist mostly of nontribal or detribalized people, those for whom tribal ties have weakened and been replaced or at least superseded over the generations by other ties. Sanaa, though in the highlands and surrounded by tribes and tribal lands, is not tribal. The history of North Yemen is largely the history of tension if not conflict between the "land of insolence" with its tribes and their customary law, on the one hand, and the urban centers in which the Zaydi imamate or some other Islamic political institution has served to protect and propagate Islamic law, morals, and faith. Though nearly all the tribesmen of North Yemen are Zaydis, their Zaydism makes many concessions to tribal law and custom, a matter of persistent concern to the guardians of Zaydism.

The traditional social order in Sanaa and the major towns of the highlands, and with variations in the large settlements in the other regions, consisted of a stratified class system bounded on the top and bottom by castes. Still

firmly in place in the sixth decade of this century, this system has changed only in part in recent decades. At the bottom were the *akhdam* (the servants), a caste consisting of black descendants of Ethiopians or other Africans who toiled as street sweepers, popular musicians, and other menials. At the top were the sayyids, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad who, in the case of the Zaydi community, traced this descent through Fatima and Ali, the Prophet's daughter and son-in-law. Zaydi law required that all candidates for the imamate be Zaydi sayyids, and most of the imams had been drawn over the centuries from several great sayyid families. The sayyid caste provided many of the small number of administrators and judges who served the imamate as well as many of the larger number of religious leaders, teachers, and scholars of Islamic law and theology. Whether comfortable or poor, and many were poor, the sayyids made up the aristocracy of North Yemen.

Just below the aristocratic sayyid caste was the qadi class, a privileged group of "commoners" who occupied positions in the imamate, often very high and sensitive positions, but were not eligible by reason of non-sayyid lineage to be imam. Indeed, the imams used members of the qadi class to protect themselves from and to make themselves less dependent upon sayyid pretenders to the imamate. In theory open to all who were schooled and became learned in Islamic law and theology, the qadi class tended over the centuries to be the preserve of an only slowly changing group of privileged families. Below the qadi class was the large group of artisans, skilled workers, merchants, and small traders, often organized into guilds. This very heterogeneous group was not closed and allowed for some upward and downward movement. Some families, through hard work, connections, and luck, even rose into the qadi class. Finally, there was the hard-to-escape muzayyan class, which consisted of those whose demeaning lot it was to be butchers, barbers, and in some areas, growers of vegetables.

The hierarchical differences that existed in traditional Yemeni society were more matters of status and role than of wealth. North Yemen was a very poor country, and the economy generated very little of the surplus required for great differences in wealth or even status. There was more than a little substance to the egalitarian ethos of the tribes, and the economically poor tribal areas imposed an austere life on shaykh and follower alike. Just as the tribesmen had easy access to their shaykhs, ordinary folk in the cities and towns had ready access to their imam or other notables. The imam lived better than most of the other prominent notables—sayyids and qadis—and the latter groups lived better than the common people, but the differences were surprisingly small by modern standards. Although there was a small number of great landowners, especially on the southern uplands and the Tihama, these landlords were often land poor, and most peasants in most parts of the country had ownership or other rights to a parcel of land and often a water source. The afternoon *qat* session, in which Yemenis gathered to chew *qat* leaves as well as to relax, converse, joke, do business, and listen to poems and the *oud*, captured the measure of egalitarianism

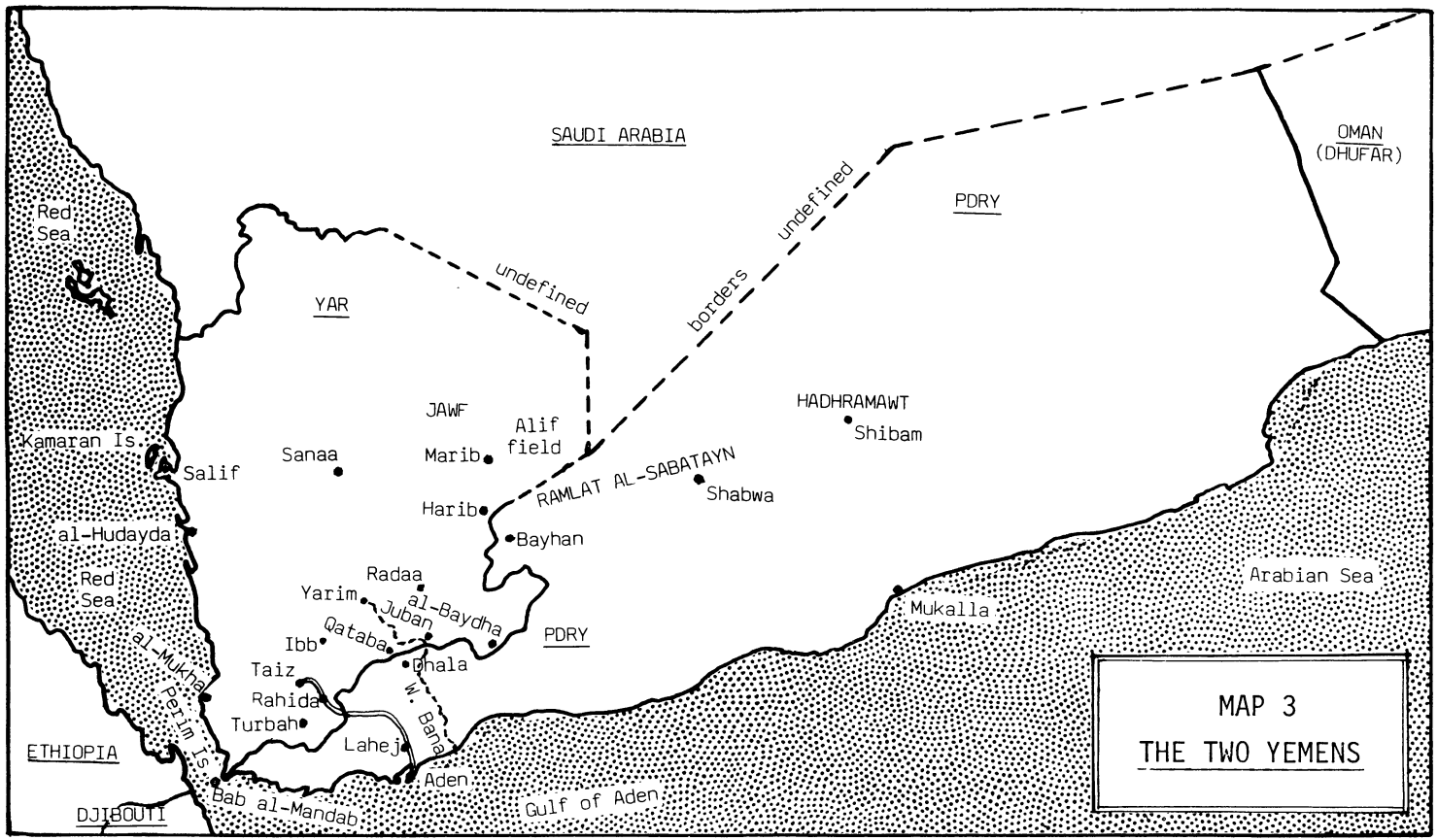
of egalitarianism in traditional Yemen. The fact that the chewers ordered themselves roughly according to status around the rectangular diwan, the choicest section reserved to the notables present, is less striking than the fact that these notables regularly chewed *qat* with their poor relatives, tenants, petitioners, scribes, and guards.

History and the Yemeni Nation

The ideas of Yemen as a place and of the people of Yemen go back to the dawn of recorded history. Although some might wish to include the regions of Najran, Jizan, and Asir in southwestern Saudi Arabia and the province of Dhufar if not all of Oman, most Yemenis agree in the 1980s that Yemen and the Yemenis are the place and people contained within the boundaries of two territorial states, the YAR and the PDRY. (See Map 3.) Notwithstanding a quarter century of talk about unification of the "two parts" of Yemen, or the possibility that unity may indeed be realized in coming years, Yemen has been embraced by a single political system only very rarely over the past two millennia and never in recent centuries. And in these rare instances, it was a matter of the subjugation and domination of one part or faction of Yemen over the rest. For most centuries, Yemenis were divided among a few or many different political systems, much like the Germans and the Italians in the years before the creation of the German and the Italian nation-states in the nineteenth century. "The Yemens," wrote R. B. Sergeant, "closely resemble mediaeval Scotland in their tribal foraying, vendettas, murder, shifting alliances, courage and treachery, generosity and close-fistedness—the attempts by imams, kings and sultans to establish centralized law and order—that inevitably break down into dynastic strife."[2]

The emergence of two Yemens, and the homogenization within and differentiation between the two groups of Yemenis in the two Yemens, though explicable in part by the geography of the Zaydi-Shafai cleavage, is more the result of a process that began in the mid-nineteenth century with the second Ottoman occupation of North Yemen and the British seizure of the port of Aden. Just as the creation of South Yemen was the accretive result of the subsequent interactions of the British colonial rulers with the people of Aden and the indigenous political units in what came to be known as the Aden Protectorates, the creation of North Yemen resulted from the struggle until early in the twentieth century between the Ottoman occupiers and a resurgent Zaydi imamate and from the latter's subsequent efforts to extend and consolidate its rule over all of Yemen through the sixth decade of this century. The attentions of the Yemenis in the south focused on Aden and the British, whereas those of the Yemenis in the north focused on Sanaa, the Ottomans, and the Zaydi imamate. Different political cultures began to grow out of these different foci.

Memories of a glorious past, the remote past between 1000 B.C. and A.D. 750, are part of the stuff of which are made the modern ideas of Yemen as a place and a Yemeni people. Point out a pile of rubble in the interior


SAUDI ARABIA
OMAN (DHUFAR)
PDRY
undefined
undefined
borders
YAR
JAWF
Alif field
HADHRAMAWT
Shibam
Red Sea
Kamaran Is.
Salif
Sanaa
Marib
RAMLAT AL-SABATAYN
Shabwa
Harib
Bayhan
al-Hudayda
Red Sea
Radaa
Yarim
al-Baydha
Juban
Qataba
Ibb
Dhala
PDRY
Taiz
Rahida
Turbah
W. Banea
Lahej
al-MUKha
Perim Is.
ETHIOPIA
Aden
Bab al-Mandab
DJIBOUTI
Gulf of Aden
Arabian Sea
Mukalla
MAP 3
THE TWO YEMENS

of Yemen, and an illiterate Yemeni is likely to say proudly *hadha himyari*, "that's Himyaritic," regardless of whether it is Turkish from the mid-nineteenth century or a vestige of one of the commercial kingdoms that thrived along the frankincense trail before the Himyarites established their rule early in the Christian era. The Yemenis are a proud people, proud of this historical legacy, and they are quick to compare the culture and legacy of their rich neighbors in Saudi Arabia unfavorably with their own.

Another source of the Yemenis' pride and sense of being equal to any other people is the absence of much of a colonial experience. The second Ottoman occupation in the second half of the nineteenth century was short and inconclusive, and the Yemenis take credit for having driven the Turks from their land early in the twentieth century. As a consequence, the Yemenis are not at all obsequious in their dealings with westerners, and they are not complicated and conflicted by love-hate, superiority-inferiority feelings toward the modern industrial West. Even modern, travelled Yemenis have in them a bit of the Yemeni villager who, told that you come from New York City, exclaims: "But surely it is not so grand and glorious as Sanaa."

Though conscious and proud of their Arab roots, most Yemenis probably identify themselves first as Muslims or Yemenis. This is largely the result of the location of North Yemen on the edge of the Arab world and of its long cultural and historical isolation from most of the rest of the Arab world. The modern mass media and the YAR's increased contact with the outside world have enlarged the identification of Yemenis with their fellow Arabs—among them the Palestinians—and made them far more aware than before of the friends and enemies of the Arab world.